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MR. WANAMAKER'S ADDRESS

To the Aisle Managers

OF THE

John Wanamaker Store

PHILADELPHIA

*In relation to the Saturday closing
during July and August*

MAY 27, 1914



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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

I am very glad to be invited to meet you tonight for this little conference. The kindness of the people in noticing the plans for the holidays has brought me in contact with a great many of them, when they have come in person to present their papers with their signatures ; and in this instance, Mr. Moore, who is at my left, came and suggested that you would like to have a few minutes' talk over things.

I thought the best thing to do was to have the meeting right away, and so we are here tonight. I think it is not necessary to have a long discussion. It would be very much more interesting to all of us if you would tell me what is on your minds. It is not necessary to praise me at all for what has taken place.

It is one of the greatest satisfactions of my life that I am all the time striving to see the way for better things. I believe that the people can be educated to go along with us in the matter of shortening the hours of service, and in this particular matter of making summer Saturdays of July and August a part of the holidays.

There occurred yesterday in the city of New York, where I spent the day, a meeting about like this. Perhaps some of you heard of it, and it may have suggested this meeting to you. It was a very great surprise to me to find about sixty of the New York buyers and a few of the managers waiting for me after the first meeting of the day, which was with the advertising people. I spent an hour with the advertising people and then went down to my own office, where the buyers were gathered. There were two very beautiful addresses made, one by Mr. Strassburger, and you would have thought he was a college president. I don't believe Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, could have done it any better than he did ; and then there was that most capable woman who has been in the house a great many years, whom Mr. Brewer knows very well, Mrs. Florence Stowell, who spoke for the women, and it was a very delightful meeting ; then I had to say something, and I said that it had always been a kind of a nightmare to me to remember how things were when I was a boy and began to work in the city and learned how little opportunity there was for young fellows to get an education, because the night schools had not yet started and the day schools were only fairly good schools, and they were not large enough to take the children in, and the time spent by the working people covered the whole day and parts of the nights, so that we workers had no time or opportunity to be educated. All the little stores on Ridge Avenue and some of the other streets, Second Street for example, which was a great business street at that time, were open until ten o'clock. They opened at seven o'clock in the morning, and the stores on Market Street (there were no large stores on Market Street) started at seven o'clock and kept open until seven o'clock, while the little stores were open

until ten o'clock. On Saturday night they were open until eleven o'clock or eleven-thirty—practically midnight. Many a time I left old Oak Hall at ten minutes to twelve, just in time to get home before Sunday began.

Now, what chance had a man even to get acquainted with his family, or to have any recreation, or to have any amusement? The hours were long, business was exacting, and a fellow hardly had a chance to get any daylight at home. It is not so bad as that today, not nearly so bad, but still it is bad enough. I believe that there are lots of men and women who have the same feeling about making homes for themselves and would do so but for the fact that long hours of service and lack of education leave them unskilled and unable to earn salaries sufficient for home-makers. The movement that we are now making is a beginning of something better for people, when shorter hours and more of them for study will enable them to make a new beginning. I remember the first weeks of the business in 1876, when we had nothing like the car-traveling facilities that we have at the present; we had omnibuses and horse cars, and they consumed a great deal of time going and coming. People in our employ, at one time, brought their lunch with them. We were the first to prepare a place where we furnished cooking ranges to the people to cook anything they brought; we furnished, without cost, milk and sugar and some other little things—I don't remember now just what they were. At one time, I think it was potatoes to roast. We had a great idea that a hot potato for lunch would be very nice, and so we started at the beginning in just a small way, feeling our way along. Then came the one-week holidays, then the two-week holidays, without loss of pay.

Now, it seems to me that in this thing that we are doing, it may be a response to the human spirit that is in people who care for each other to try to make life easier for each other; the two holidays together; your Sundays your own always; and the other holidays and the final arrangement of it that half of the force can alternate in coming in late on Monday mornings.

I am very hopeful indeed that it will be productive of health and happiness to us all, especially if it is going to turn out in a general closing of stores, workshops and factories; for not a wheel will turn, not a tool will be lifted, which, of course, adds to the costs of this movement. But I have the greatest belief and hope that the people at large will be interested enough to make the usual six days in the first five days of the week, leaving Saturday free from business. Of course, there is a compensation of doing something ourselves in bearing the expense of the idle workrooms and idle machinery. The whole country will be looking on and taking notice and asking for reports as to how the experiment turns out, before following our lead. I think this closing may make a wonderful revolution in business. I confess to you that I hope that the day will come, instead of you praising me for what I have done, I will have to say that I have not done anything, but that you have done everything by keeping up the sales that turns back to you the praises you are now giving me. If you have gotten a holiday and it has not been a loss to business, I shall have to praise you for it. I am very hopeful that this will be the case.

The question is whether we are going to look at the thing in the right way, or whether we are simply going to consider it as a very generous episode of no particular consequence, or whether we are going to look at it in a serious way as a great business proposition that might in the next year lead to larger things. Suppose we commence on the 15th of June next year and run until the 15th of September; that would be three months. Why not? And if the people are with us, we can keep on extending it. What will that result in, do you suppose? I would not be surprised if in the course of five or six years, or less than that, that we would have universal holidays on Saturday all day the whole year round, excepting the month of the Christmas holidays. Really, it would make very little difference if every business house were closed on Saturdays and the people would adjust themselves to it.

It is true that there are some stores employing few people, and with classes of goods that are not much wanted in the summer time, that would not be much affected if they never opened their doors on Saturday; but to a store like this it makes a great deal of difference, as you know.

The other side of it is this: I recognize that you earnest and energetic people desire not only to help to make these new holidays prove a success, but that you want to do more than that. This is your store. You see in its prosperity you have had opportunities to rise in it. You have no losses to meet. It is the principle of the business to try to hold steadily all year round all the employees all the time, the exceptions being perhaps in the millinery department, or in one or two of the departments like that. Even in those departments I think it is a mistake, where there are good people, never to let them be absent.

Mr. Brewer is here, and would say that there are a good many of the people that were brought up in the millinery department and departments of that kind, who know that it is customary to shut down, as it is called, at certain seasons of the year; they know that when they enter the service, and they prepare for slack times. They are familiar with that old custom, and they are generally well enough paid to spread their salaries over idle months; but it seems to me that people who want to work could be transferred to other sections.

If you can look at this new movement of the Saturday holiday in a serious way and get your thinking machines into operation, and so impress every one with whom you have to do that this experiment means a great deal more to the whole world than anything we business people have ever done, you will be doing a great deal. This vision that I have isn't simply a thing that is connected with this one business. Some people look down upon stores and clerks, floor walkers, shopwomen and shopmen, as they term us; but I think, in our association with each other, we should grow in character, knowledge and ability, but we must have the vision of possibilities if we are going to get anywhere worth while.

I said to a college president that was consulting me about a council with Mr. Curtis and a number of other gentlemen who are on his board—I said there are two things about your college that I would like to, for myself, have a different view of. First of all, I would like to have a much more

definite idea of what your college aims to be. You were born years ago, and you have been going along in the same old way, but what is your present purpose? What star are you following? I think if I knew that, that would help me. Thus far the matter of being on your council has not been serious enough. It is only diversion, but it is not a serious thing.

I feel as if we might demonstrate to the world of workers, like ourselves, that it is possible to get the public behind us; so that, for the sake of those who toil, there will be no loss, in salaries or employment, in closing our store for Saturday holidays.

We made a special effort for Washington's Birthday and for Lincoln's Birthday. I thought it might be a good thing if I could publish, after the month of Washington's Birthday and Lincoln's Birthday, that we had not fallen back in sales. I seldom publish anything like that, because it would seem like bragging; but I am glad to say that there was no loss in the sales for those two days.

This Memorial Day—some stores close part of the day, some are open nearly all day, and others are open as long as they have any business; but we sat down one day and said, "It is the Soldiers' Memorial. We must never forget what they did. We will close the store all day."

It seems to me that we have two things to help us. The first is our own happiness in the opportunity of having more time with our families to visit an old mother, if we have one; and to be more with our books. I think it ought to help us to better health in having two holidays together. It will help the spirit, and the sympathy of our customers will be in accord with us and help to make it permanent instead of for but one year.

I know there are people who down in their hearts say: "We have too many holidays now." They also say, when they were working they had to work from ten to twelve hours a day. You are going too far, they say. They write to us and talk to us in that way. But let us wait and see how the two holidays work out.

Now, this later hour until 9.30 on Monday morning will be an added satisfaction. I think we can just as well manage it as not. I don't want to do just as little as possible for our people; I want to do just as much as possible. It seems to me that every head of a department ought to make a study of this situation. I should think that we would try to display our goods better. I should think that we would try to attract people in every possible way. I think there are a great many things that could be corrected. For example, so many goods don't stay sold. People got the habit that they can take home half a dozen waists, or half a dozen remnants of silk, and return anything they want. You men and women are between the customers and the salespeople. You give the welcomes; you have the duty of carrying out the system; you give the good-mornings and the spirit of the day for doing the best work—that is your part. An aisle man that has a long face and comes down after a bad night for the lack of rest, with a cross word, he kills the spirit of the person he meets when he says some ill-considered word or fails to be polite.

Now, what is it that you would like me to do to help you clinch this very desirable thing, so that it won't be given up after a trial of one year

I might say, what would you do if you had a store? This Saturday closing has not been an easy thing to do; our people in New York have not been altogether in favor of it, and some of them have wanted to discontinue the usual holidays. If there are too many holidays, and if that is going to make our people lazy, that is something to be found out; but it is very simple to keep everything we had before and add as much more as we possibly can, and that is where we are tonight. I feel as if it were going to be two months of battle. We ought to put our flags up. I began by putting on the main aisle some few benches. We have to do something to take care of the people these hot days. I think I would like to do some other things. I would appreciate it if you would suggest something to me; if you would just get your minds going. I think the real genius of labor is ceaseless activity. It is not that somebody has a great, big brain that thinks out great things, but the real thing is to keep at it all the time.

I went to New York yesterday on the seven-o'clock train, went up to the Twenty-third Street ferry. I wanted to see the big vessel land that was pulled out at ten o'clock. There she sat, the most queenly thing you ever saw, bigger than the Waldorf-Astoria; far longer, almost twice as long as William Penn is, as he stands up there, 525 feet to the top of his head, and you add the two feet that he stands on, which makes 527 feet, and this ship is nearly twice that size, 950 feet. Well, I was one hour too soon, and so I sat down, when along came an old darky who was mopping the platform. I had never seen the colored man before, but I said to him:

"Well, I see you're back at your old job again."

"Yes, sah!"

I said: "I suppose you go over this every day?"

"Yes, sah," said the darky; "I goes over it three times a day."

"And did you clean up all the dirt when you went over it yesterday?"

"Yes, sah," said the old colored man; "Ah did, but, you see, this is new dirt every day."

Well, now, that was a very little thing; but the truth is, it is something new to be done over every day. What we did yesterday is one thing; what we do today is another.

The floors have to be mopped, suggestions have to be made and goods rearranged, and the same old story told to the people of just how it has got to go, day by day.

I really think that the whole of this situation depends on the aisle managers and salespeople more than on any one else, because you are the captains, and it is you who inspire or depress your people. You have got to make them see how it will be possible to add a portion of the half-day's sales lost to the other five days. We will have to increase by a little each day to make up the Saturday's lost business. I don't think that will be so very hard to do; but you are in a position to say whether it is possible to give our employees, in the years to come, a Saturday alongside of their Sunday.

